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### **Local College Student Experiences Marine Science Firsthand at Woods Hole Science Aquarium in Massachusetts**

They came from diverse educational and family backgrounds and from states across the nation, but for Kelly Watson of St. Louis, Mo., and Washington, D.C., one of the 11 high school and college students who spent the summer at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium (WHSA) in Falmouth, Mass., it was a summer to remember.

Feeding fish, training harbor seals, cleaning tanks, leading shore-side collecting trips for the public, and helping children and adults learn about marine animals at the touch tanks were all part of her daily routine. The WHSA offers three summer programs for students who have completed grade 10 or higher. The programs are run by the WHSA staff, and are projects of NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center and the neighboring private, nonprofit Marine Biological Laboratory.

For college student Watson, a senior at Howard University in Washington, DC, it was her first experience living and working by the ocean. "I wanted to do something different this summer, and didn't want to work in an office on a computer," she said. "I had no idea what I was getting into, and my friends didn't believe me when I told them I was going to Cape Cod to work in an aquarium for the summer."

Watson was one of three college students working at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium June 30 through August 20 through the Bradford E. Brown Student Internship program, named for a retired NOAA Fisheries scientist who was a leader in recruiting young people into fishery science. Eight high school students also participated in summer programs at the aquarium.

The annual internships provide both high school and college students with the opportunity to work with a professional staff caring for a collection of about 140 species of fish and invertebrates common to the continental shelf from Maine to North Carolina, two harbor seals named LuSeal and Bumper, and sometimes sea turtles held for rehabilitation and eventual release. The interns learn about marine animal husbandry, aquarium operations, conservation, and public education. They are also trained to serve as assistant naturalists on public collecting walks to local harbors and estuaries.

Watson and the other college interns also participated in the two-week Careers in Marine Science Seminar July 21 to August 1, along with eight high school students from California, Massachusetts, New York and Utah. Several high school students stayed for an additional 1-2 weeks after the programs officially ended to help with animal husbandry and to serve as junior naturalists on collecting walks.

Originally from St. Louis, where family still resides, Watson now lives in Washington, DC and attends Howard University, where she is entering her senior year as a math major with a focus on secondary education.

It was cool when she first arrived in Woods Hole a week after college ended in May. "I had to buy a sweatshirt because it was much colder than DC," she recalled. "But now I've gotten used to it and I love being by the ocean."

Watson says she knew in the fourth grade that she wanted to be a teacher, although teaching math was not her original focus. A dancer since she was young with a preference for jazz and hip hop, she planned to major in dance when she went to Howard. But when she got there she says she immediately switched to math, and although it has been a struggle she plans to graduate in May 2009.

After two years attending college full time, she worked numerous part-time jobs and attended college part time for the past few years, most recently working at an after-school program at Shaw Community Ministry for junior high school age students in Washington, where she planned and directed enrichment activities and field trips and tutored students in math and English. In the fall she will resume a full-time college schedule, taking four math classes, and will spend the spring semester student teaching at a public high school in Washington, DC.

Watson says she will remain in Washington and hopes to teach high school math after she graduates. After a few years teaching she plans to apply to graduate school in educational administration at George Washington University, another step toward her goal of being a high school principal.

Her favorite activity during her internship at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium, operated by NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center, was developing an Aquarium scavenger hunt for students in grades three and higher. "It got them to read the signs about each of the animals and do some math at the same time." She admits she had only been to an aquarium once before, when she took students from the after-school program on a field trip to a Washington aquarium a few weeks before she headed to Woods Hole.

She liked feeding the fish and says they all have different personalities, but her favorite animal was "Bumper", a year-old blind male seal who was rescued after stranding on a Long Island beach, the victim of a shark attack. "I prefer to call him 'Honey' because he is so sweet. It's cool because he responded to my voice."

Her biggest surprise this summer was learning that fish can get sick just like humans, and that they can take vitamins and even birth control. “This experience has been totally out of my box, and it has been great. I will tell everyone now to go to the ocean and definitely go visit an aquarium. You will learn so much.”

Inspired by the public’s fascination with marine life and the ocean she has seen in Aquarium visitors, Watson even found an unexpected way to use her summer experience in the future.

“I can use marine science examples in my math classes to make it more fun and interesting. The Aquarium scavenger hunt showed me that students will read and use math if it involves something they like. I’m thrilled it was a success, and I definitely plan to use marine science in my teaching career.”

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